

Citywide Strategy for Youth Development: making Boston a safe and hopeful place for all youth

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT REPORT:

“EVERYBODY’S OUT THERE FOR YOUTH”

This report, published in April 2000, consists of two volumes: Volume I is the *Framework for Action*, and Volume II is the *Assessment of Resources and Needs*. The *Framework* is made up of six goals and 29 objectives (see last page for grid) with accompanying strategies that describe much of the work currently going on in Boston to improve the lives of young people and their families.

The *Framework* is an “assets-based” approach to youth development and can be used in any community to help develop new strategies and collaborations to improve services.

Volume II contains a listing of major resources and needs/gaps related to 20 youth development topics.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Boston is a city that has come together to support its youth. Its two major strategic goals this past decade have been to reduce youth violence and improve school achievement.

The *Framework for Action* places those two goals in a broader youth development context, wherein being safe and doing well in school are means to the end of becoming decent, responsible and economically self-sufficient adults. The *Framework* incorporates an assets, or strengths, approach and places programs and activities for youth in the holistic context of family and community. It builds upon the many successful initiatives, models and activities in the city and highlights the challenges we still face.

Goals 2-6 of the *Framework* correspond to broad categories of youth development, while the first goal and accompanying objectives are fundamental to all the others. The first objective of Goal 1 is the cornerstone of the *Framework*: collaboration, commitment, innovation and risk-taking are the ingredients of success for all other goals and objectives.

The following are the key findings – the strengths and challenges – that describe the status of youth and youth services in Boston today.

STRENGTHS

1. Surveys of youth in Boston show that the majority are doing well – They exercise and play sports, are involved in creative arts, spend time volunteering, feel connected to school, have adults and friends in their lives with positive values, and have aspirations for their futures.

2. Data from other sources also show positive trends: violence is down, there are fewer teen births, two out of three high school graduates go on to higher education, and a higher percentage of high school graduates are employed compared to their counterparts nationwide.
3. Boston made an extraordinary community mobilization to support young people in its successful strategy to reduce violence, bringing many caring adults – such as youth workers, ministers, health professionals, mentors, neighbors, artists, and others – into the lives of young people.
4. The strategy to reduce youth violence was also characterized by high levels of collaboration among law enforcement and other government agencies, and between those agencies and community organizations and residents. The collaboration and mobilization (#3 above) were due in part to the political will of the city's leaders and the initiative taken by many working in the field to support and value all youth.
5. The spirit of collaboration described above is spreading to other fields as well, including education, after-school, employment and training, and the arts.
6. A number of organizations have adopted an explicit youth development or assets approach in their work, whether as funders, providers, trainers, or policy developers.
7. The increased collaboration described above is also a key feature in the many “systems changes” of large institutions, which are taking more of a partnership approach with communities and other organizations to fulfill their mandates.
8. There has been a tremendous upsurge of interest in supporting out-of-school time opportunities for children and youth. There is increased funding, links to academic skill building, efforts to reach more children and youth with disabilities, and emphasis on improving quality through staff training and measuring outcomes.
9. Connected to state education reform has been a comprehensive mobilization around learning, from literacy initiatives for young children, to the reform plan of the Boston Public Schools, and to an emphasis on increasing college and career access for all youth, including those at high-risk for school drop-out and/or gang involvement.
10. Boston has numerous models for the support of families with young children, including home visiting, nurturing education, parent organizing, young fathers initiatives, and child witness to violence.

CHALLENGES

1. While school reform in Boston has produced positive results in improved standardized test scores, comparatively, the scores of Boston Public Schools students are low. High percentages of young people are at risk for failing the MCAS and either not graduating or dropping out. The “achievement gap” in standardized test scores puts African-American and Latino students at particularly high risk.
2. Concerns about the mental health and well-being of children and youth have become evident through surveys of youth and reports from educators and providers. Training is needed for providers to help them better identify young people with emotional or

mental disorders. Access to services is constrained by managed care restrictions, not enough services for linguistic and cultural populations, and by the stigma against seeking professional help. Increasing rates of substance abuse, especially heroin, are closely linked with mental illness.

3. A significant number of older teens and young adults, age 16-24 year olds, face obstacles to successful outcomes in their lives. They may be coming out of jail or DYS, not working or in school, or “aging out” of DSS foster care and facing homelessness. The city’s housing crisis is affecting them particularly hard.
4. The coming decade will see an increase in the population of teenagers, so prevention programs and services need to address the current 8-14 year olds. Youth in middle schools are increasingly being targeted for gang recruitment.
5. The continuum of relationship and family violence is a critical risk factor for healthy child and youth development. Children exposed to violence between their parents suffer serious emotional damage which impacts their future development. Domestic violence rates in the city have not decreased, and dating violence and sexual harassment is perceived by many youth as a problem among their peers.
6. Males and females have different developmental issues that need to be addressed in order for them to succeed. These gender differences need to be addressed, in part, through better understanding of the different developmental needs of boys and girls from early childhood through adolescence.
7. There are few programs to support better parent-teen relationships. Among recent immigrants, there are “generation gap” concerns around the clash in values of teens being drawn to an Americanized culture and away from their families’ cultures.
8. In spite of the tremendous mobilization of resources in the city, there are still significant gaps in services, in out-of-school time, parenting, mental health, drug treatment, transitional housing, child care, adult education, ESL and other programs.
9. While Boston has become a more inclusive and diverse city, there continue to be instances of hate crimes or bias, as well as institutional discrimination, that need to be addressed.
10. In an era of increasing income and wealth inequalities, many poor and working families face a constellation of problems – such as rising housing costs and insufficient education and training to climb career ladders – that obstruct their ability to support their children and build them a financial future.
11. While many organizations are taking an explicit youth development or asset-based approach (see #6 above in the list of “strengths”), the challenge is to improve program quality by building those assets into program design, protocols and measures.

Thomas M. Menino, Mayor
Office of Community Partnerships
Juanita B. Wade, Director
April 2000



BOSTON'S YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

GOALS

1. Affirm and expand Boston's commitment to youth.	2. Strengthen community to support youth and families.	3. Strengthen the capacity of parents and families to support their children.
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OBJECTIVES

1. Nurture a climate that encourages innovation and coordination. 2. Increase and train caring adults in the lives of youth. 3. Adopt a common asset-based framework. 4. Empower young people to reach their own successful outcomes. 5. Improve the quality of programs and services. 6. Promote the diversity and inclusion of all youth. 7. Provide accurate information. 8. Increase funding and resources.	1. Build the capacity of communities to organize themselves, plan programs and partner with institutions to support their youth and families. 2. Implement "systems changes" between and among government agencies and community. 3. Leverage private sector resources to support families, youth and communities. 4. Stabilize neighborhoods and support families through access to jobs and housing.	1. Promote healthy relationships in families, especially between parents and teens. 2. Protect children from family violence, abuse or neglect. 3. Support poor and working families to be economically self-sufficient. 4. Respond to the special needs of immigrant and refugee families. 5. Provide opportunities for parent involvement. 6. Increase the capacity of young mothers and fathers to support and nurture their children.
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GOALS

4. Engage children, youth and young adults in a comprehensive approach to learning.	5. Promote the health, wellness and safety of children and youth.	6. Support youth and young adults who are at high risk for failing to achieve the goals of youth development.
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OBJECTIVES

1. Have every child enter kindergarten ready to learn and be an able reader by the end of the third grade. 2. Improve school achievement and reduce the gap among ethnic/racial groups in test scores. 3. Provide multiple avenues to college and career for every young person in Boston.	1. Improve the mental health and well-being of children and youth. 2. Promote positive peer relationships. 3. Increase opportunities for enrichment and leadership. 4. Reduce harmful risk behaviors through treatment, intervention and prevention. 5. Continue to reduce youth violence. 6. Provide a healthy physical environment.	1. Provide alternative education/job opportunities and support for young people who are disconnected from school and work. 2. Provide supports to reintegrate older youth and young adults, particularly young men, into the community from correctional, court and social service systems.
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